



A Monumental Migration

No other butterfly travels as far as the monarch—every fall they migrate as much as 1,500 miles to reach the moderate climate of their ancestral winter refuges. These tiny adventurers, four to five generations descended from the monarchs that wintered here last year, cluster on “butterfly trees,” colorful wings closed. In balmy weather they flutter about, feed on flower nectar, and mate.

Egg-laden females journey north in spring, stopping to deposit eggs on milkweed plants. In a few days the caterpillar eats its way out of the egg casing and feeds on the milkweed. It sheds its striped outer skin multiple times as it grows, and eventually the skin hardens into a hanging shell-like chrysalis from which the adult butterfly emerges.

Though milkweed is poisonous to many animals, its foul-tasting poison protects the monarch by making it taste bad. As a result, most predators recognize the butterfly's distinctive markings and avoid it.

